

# PACIFIC PORTRAITS

*The People Behind the Scenes  
at Pacific University*

VOLUME 1



BEE TREE

PACIFIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES  
Forest Grove, Oregon

Pacific Portraits: The People Behind the Scenes at Pacific University (Volume One)

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Cover and interior design by Emily Coats  
Interior layout by Pacific University Students

Published by Pacific University Libraries 2015

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ISBN-13 978-0-9884827-6-0

Pacific University Libraries  
2043 College Way  
Forest Grove, Oregon 97116

[www.pacificu.edu/libraries](http://www.pacificu.edu/libraries)

Published in the United States of America



Bee Tree Books

An imprint of the Pacific University Libraries

*Our treasure lies in the beehive of our knowledge. We are perpetually on the way thither, being by nature [...] honey gatherers of the mind.*

Friedrich Nietzsche

The “Bee Tree”, an iconic ivy-covered tree that stood on the Pacific University campus for many years, was already old and hollow when pioneer Tabitha Brown arrived in Oregon in 1846. Mrs. Brown started a home for orphans that would grow into Pacific University. According to the Forest Grove *News-Times*, the tree was “said to have housed a swarm of bees who furnished the little old lady with honey which she sold to buy provisions for her orphan children.”

## AL WEISS

*narrative by Madison Meltebeke and  
Samantha Wacker*

*photographs by Mahala Nelson*

IF YOU STEP INTO LIBRARY 107, THE first thing you will notice is the huge Mac desktop computer screen that takes up half of the desk against the window. Let your eyes fall and you'll see cords littered across the table-tops, as well as every electronic device imaginable: iPads, microphones, tripods, and DSLR cameras. The man behind the computer, Al Weiss, is tall and slender with medium-length grey hair slicked back into a low ponytail. His title is lengthy, but by no means a bore: he is the Director of Educational Technology and Curricular Innovation, and he is the Founding Director of the Center for Educational Technology and Curricular Innovation at Pacific University. With his plaid button up tucked in, and his hands wrapped delicately around a hot cup of tea, he is responsible for assisting with technological integration in the classrooms all across the board at Pacific.

"My typical day is never typical," Weiss begins, "I get to see what everyone at every campus is doing



in the classroom, and witness each technological breakthrough that we make at Pacific." His days are spent answering emails, sitting in meetings, engaging in video conference calls, and teaching seminars to ensure Pacific's faculty are up to date on methods of technological support in the classroom. "I love that I'm able to dip my hands into multiple levels of the university," Weiss emphasizes. "One minute I'll be speaking with the President and the Board of Trustees, the next I'm helping a student simply log into Moodle."

Al moved to Oregon from Illinois in 2009 when he was hired by Pacific University. A major reward he's seen since his employment began has been the growth of Moodle. "We've seen 30% more courses using Moodle across the institution," Weiss mentions. "That's done through student's feedback. It's my job to help faculty see that students want their grades to be posted to Moodle. It's a line of communication from your professors." The site is used by about 65% of faculty on campus today.



Al gestures with his hands, very animatedly, like a dancer. His palms open and welcoming, fingers parted to emphasize every word, only setting them down for a moment. When they rest, it's always left hand over right fist, his golden wedding band reflecting the computer screen they work in front of. "The university doesn't mandate that anybody use any particular technology in their classroom. Some people use Moodle, some don't and that's fine," he explains. "It's good. We want faculty thinking critically about the teaching environment—why they would use something and why they wouldn't." Weiss also holds seminars on programs like Google Sites and PollEverywhere, a site that allows students to answer questions on the board via their cell phones or laptop.

"If you want to engage, I'll show you how to do it." His eyes dance back to the computer screen briefly, as if anxiety has set in from being away from his technology too long.

When Al's passion for his job is not in action, his passion is his family. His wife and three daughters—ages thirteen, nine, and six—are obvious joys in his life; when asked about them a wide smile transforms his face and he begins gesturing excitedly. Al's giant Mac desktop on the right of the room woke when he wiggled the mouse with his fingertips and began searching through photos taken with his Nikon DSLR, trying to find the best picture of his daughters. "I'm the biggest hiker in the family; the kids aren't that into it," he says, still looking through pictures, his hand at home on the mouse. Al also skis with his family, he said, "My wife doesn't ski...but my children all do." Most commonly they enjoy the slopes of the Timberline Ski Resort and the Ski-Bowl on Mount Hood. Al is interested in water sports; when he lived in Illinois he kayaked and sailed--the wind and weather conditions were perfect.

Al and his family are also passionate about traveling. Last summer Al said he and his wife took their kids to Mexico and had a wonderful time; his hands were folded left over right fist while his face displayed a pensive smile. Traveling is important to his family because of his experience in the JET Program—a Japanese exchange and teaching experience—where he met his wife Sarah. Though Al spent several years in Japan and had become fluid in the language, he says with a dismissive wave of his hand that his skills are now "a little rusty."

Al's most recent hobby is Latin dancing. Around two years ago Al and his wife began taking Latin dance lessons. "We'd go out a little bit in the clubs, but we also got into performing," he said. They mostly dance the social Latin dances Salsa, Bachata, Merengue, and Cha-cha-cha, but Al's favorite is salsa. "It's a little bit faster, a little more technical than some of the others," he





says, explaining very simply the style of the dance. When he and Sarah dance, a large smile crosses his face and he looks at her with joy. His hands, clasped with hers only at the tips of their fingers, direct the dance, spinning Sarah and moving her through the steps. His hand has power over the feeling and rhythm of the dance, like it has power over

his computer mouse; it directs the volume of the music they dance to—sounds like those he grew up to in the 70s. As she turns his hand moves with her, his other hand waits at his side for her to face him again, waiting to take her free hand and move back and forth with the music. “I feel that vibe,” he says with a smile and a wave of his hand. Al proves

his ability to direct the symphony of his work life with technology and computers accompanied by his personal life and family, his hands creating and emphasizing his love for both things.

